AN EXHIBIT AT THE
CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY 22 - DECEMBER 10, 2018

EXHIBIT SCRIPT

© 2018
CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Introduction

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered the First World War.

Life changed for Connecticut residents, as people faced decisions about how to support the war effort, or resist. Would they join the fight as soldiers? Work for a relief organization like the Red Cross or the YMCA? Would they raise money for the war, find a new factory job, or refuse to participate at all?

No matter what path they chose, Connecticuans struggled with concerns about immigration, refugees, discrimination, and the meaning of patriotism. They faced death, the devastating loss of family members and friends, long-lasting physical and mental wounds, and experiences they would never forget.
Section 1: Connecticut Responds to War

Connecticut Responds to War
Governor Marcus H. Holcomb led the state’s official support of the war, establishing the Connecticut State Council of Defense immediately after war was declared on April 6, 1917. Among its many tasks, the Council managed the production of war materials, established a war board in every town to coordinate resources, and organized loan drives and campaigns to conserve food and supplies.

Wall quote
“We are in this war for the same reason that we engaged in the war of our Revolution—then to establish our independence—now to preserve it.” Marcus H. Holcomb, Governor of Connecticut, around 1917

Wall quote
“This is a war to end war and to preserve ideals more sacred than life.” Retired Reverend Chauncey B. Brewster, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, around 1917

Rallying the Public
Posters were a major propaganda tool for federal and state governments. Connecticut residents encountered these advertisements on the street, in buildings, and in newsprint, encouraging them to enlist, to conserve food, and to help pay for the war by purchasing Liberty Bonds. The federal
government enacted four Liberty Loan drives during the war and a fifth Victory Loan drive after the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. The fundraising effort was a success. Connecticut residents purchased $437.5 million in Liberty Bonds, an oversubscription of 150%. This mirrored efforts across the country, which contributed a total of $17 billion.

**Military Census and the Draft**

Before war was declared, the Connecticut General Assembly authorized a state-wide census of all males age 16 or older. The census also counted the doctors, nurses, and automobiles that could be called upon during wartime.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. On May 18, Congress passed the Selective Service Act, and the first day of registration was on June 5. The draft had begun, the first since the Civil War. About 2.8 million men in the country would be drafted, and 2 million would enlist voluntarily. About 63,000 men from Connecticut would serve in the United States and Allied Forces.

**Factory production in Connecticut**

Connecticut provided materials to the Allies even before the US entered the war. Once war was declared, Connecticut manufacturers played a vital role in US wartime production. Women, African Americans who migrated from the south, and
immigrants from Eastern Europe filled the job vacancies left by men shipping off to war.

In Simsbury, the Ensign-Bickford Co. made grenade fuses. In Waterbury, the Scovill Manufacturing Co. made artillery shells. Bridgeport’s Remington Arms produced half of the US Army’s small-arms cartridges. Manufacturers throughout the state provided the military with guns, toxic gas, shells, trench knives, grenades, mess kits, textiles, gas masks, and other goods.

Area label The 1918 Flu
Even as the country marched to war, the greater threat was influenza. In 15 months, the 1918 flu killed 50 to 100 million people worldwide, more than military deaths from World War I and World War II combined. People called it the “Spanish Flu” because newspapers in Spain first reported the mass-illness, but recent scholarship suggests that the disease originated in Haskell County, Kansas. From there it spread through crowded military camps and eventually to the filthy trenches of war-torn Europe. In Connecticut, like much of the country, public events were cancelled and churches and schools closed. More than 9,000 Connecticut residents died, nearly one percent of the population.

Wall quote
“Is there any Influenza down there? There are hundreds of cases here. They have got the Armory all quarantined with it, the hospital is filled and several citizens have got it. I hope it doesn’t come my way.”
Excerpt from a letter to Frank Smith, Private 1st class, Quartermaster Corps, from friend Jess in New London, CT, September 23, 1918

**“Slackers” Not Welcome**

Congress passed the Espionage Act in June 1917 and the Sedition Act in May 1918, outlawing speech that was critical of the government. Connecticut enforced this law in addition to its own 1913 “Act Concerning Seditious Utterances.”

Connecticut residents who spoke out against the war, resisted the draft, or refused to fight, faced arrest and imprisonment. A drafted man could apply as a conscientious objector and work for the military in a non-combative role. But many applications were rejected. Those who refused to fight were sent to prison. Pacifists and socialists faced arrest and loss of employment. These “slackers,” as they were called, faced a hostile environment.

**Wall quote**

“Whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States, or the flag...shall be punished by a fine of not more than $10,000 or imprisonment for not more than twenty years, or both...” Excerpt from the Sedition Act, May 1918. The Sedition Act was an amendment to the Espionage Act
of June 1917. The amendment was repealed in 1920, but the Espionage Act remains current law.

**Wall quote**

“Our cause is our honor, our safety, and the perpetuity of our institutions. It is a War Against War. There is no room for the Debater, the Doubter, the Slacker, or the Coward.” Homer S. Cummings of Stratford, Member of the Connecticut State Council of Defense, around 1917

**Individual Highlight**

**Ulysses DeRosa**

1892-1990

Hartford, New York City
Conscientious Objector

In 1905, at the age of 13, Ulysses DeRosa left his home in Italy to join his older brother in Hartford. A year later, his brother was injured and returned to Italy. Alone, DeRosa left for New York City to look for work. In 1913, at the age of 21, he became a US citizen.

When the US military draft began in June 1917, many who registered as “conscientious objectors” (COs) came from historically pacifist churches, such as Quakers, Mennonites, and Amish. DeRosa, who joined the Society of Friends (Quakers) in 1916, was an “absolutist” CO, refusing to cooperate with any military order. DeRosa was sent to several military camps and eventually to federal prison. He participated in hunger strikes, endured beatings and humiliations from army officers and guards, and was
Supporting the War at Home
The state fully supported the war effort. Governor Holcomb established the Connecticut Home Guard on March 9, 1917. In three months the Home Guard had organized 10,000 men aged 17-60, armed and uniformed. Concerned about sabotage from secret enemy agents, throughout the war Home Guard troops stood guard over railroads, factories, and bridges.

Across the country, people conserved food to send to soldiers and war refugees in Europe. People observed Meatless Mondays and Wheatless Wednesdays and ate more fruits and vegetables (too difficult to transport overseas). The Red Cross organized social events, letter-writing, and knitting groups to make bandages and wool socks.

Training and deployment
During the war, the US Army went from 200,000 soldiers to 4.7 million. By August 1917, Connecticut National Guard units were grouped with other states into new divisions in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). The 26th “Yankee” Division was made of men from all six New England states. African American soldiers in Connecticut’s First Separate Company became part of the 93rd Infantry Division.
The AEF remained racially segregated throughout the war.

Soldiers were sent to one of 32 training camps across the country. Some spent just a few weeks there before shipping to Europe to train with the war-weary French army.

**Infographic**

**The American Expeditionary Forces (AEF)**

The US Army fighting in Europe was known as the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). In addition to the Army, the US Navy transported troops and supplies to Europe, hunted submarines, and supported the Army with Marine troops and artillery. The Air Force was not yet a separate military branch, but both the Army and Navy operated a small number of airplanes.

Before the war, the US maintained a standing volunteer army of about 120,000, known as the Regular Army. In addition, states maintained their own National Guard units (about 80,000 total). The AEF combined the Regular Army, the National Guards, and the National Army (newly drafted men) into one fighting force under the command of General John Pershing. The AEF rose to 4.7 million men by the end of the war.

How the AEF Was Organized:
The AEF consisted of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Army. Each army was divided into smaller and smaller units:

Army
Divisions
Brigades
Regiments
Battalions
Companies

Army Divisions with large numbers of Connecticut soldiers:

26th “Yankee” Division: Most Connecticut men served in this division. It was a combination of National Guard units from the six New England states.

42nd “Rainbow” Division: A unique division created from National Guard units from 26 states (including Connecticut) and the District of Columbia. Its commander, Douglas MacArthur (future WWII general), compared the division to a rainbow spanning the continent.

93rd Division: African American division that included the First Separate Company of Connecticut (National Guard). These soldiers fought under the command of the French Army and earned the nickname "Blue Helmets" after the French-issued helmets.
Wall quote  “Yesterday we were out on the range firing our machine guns and by the time we got back my tail was nearly dragging on the ground. It is about a 5 mile hike from our camp to the range and a good share of it is up hill... The last couple of days when going out to drill we have been wearing our helmets in order to get used to these tin derbys.” Ellsworth A. Hawkes, Corporal, Company B, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th “Yankee” Division, in a letter from France, Dec. 7, 1917

Individual Highlight

George W. Cheney 1888-1965
Manchester, Age 30
Captain, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th “Yankee” Division, 1917-1918
Captain, 39th Machine Gun Battalion, 13th Division, 1918

George W. Cheney joined the Connecticut National Guard, Troop B Cavalry in 1911. A Yale graduate, Cheney worked at the Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Company in Hartford, but was called to serve at the Mexican border in 1916.

In France, the machine gun had transformed traditional warfare. During an assault, soldiers defending a trench with machine guns could slaughter thousands at a time. A charge on horseback was now a thing of the past. When the United States entered the war, cavalry units were transformed into machine
gun battalions. Cheney gave up his horse and took up a machine gun.

Cheney served on the front lines in France for nine months and attended the First Corps School, Machine Gun Sector, in Gondrecourt, France. He graduated in December 1917 and served as a machine gun instructor for his battalion. In July 1918 Cheney returned to the US, where he taught machine gun tactics at various training camps until the end of the war.

**Individual Highlight**

**Stubby**

About 1914-1926  
New Haven, Age 4 or 5  
102nd Infantry, 26th “Yankee” Division, 1917-1919

During the summer of 1917, some regiments from the 26th “Yankee” Division trained on the grounds of Yale University, awaiting deployment to Europe. At Camp Yale, James Robert Conroy of New Britain, CT, made a friend that would follow him throughout the war and for many years after. Stubby, a stray dog, had wandered onto the training grounds and soon joined the soldiers for drills and mealtimes. When the 102nd Infantry shipped out, Conroy smuggled Stubby aboard the ship.

Although Stubby was an unofficial member of the 102nd, armies on both sides used dogs for many tasks. On the front lines, Stubby searched out wounded soldiers, warned others if he smelled poison gas, and
even captured a German soldier. After the war, he returned to the US a hero, marching in dozens of parades. Stubby was awarded life memberships by the American Red Cross, the American Legion, and even the Hartford YMCA.

Wall Quote

“Our Regimental Mascot”

Written by John J. Curtin, Private, Headquarters Company, 102<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 26<sup>th</sup> “Yankee” Division, after Stubby saved his life in an underground tunnel

Listen to me and I will tell,
Of a dog who went all through hell,
With the 102<sup>nd</sup> infantry, U.S.A.,
“Stubby” was with us, night and day.

He was smuggled across the sea,
And, certainly was full of glee,
When he landed at St. Nazaire,
He and Bob were a happy pair.

Near Neufchateau he stayed a while,
And in hiking, covered many a mile,
Then in February we left for the front,
And “Stubby” was ready to do his stunt.

A month and a half on Chemin des Dames,
“Stubby” behaved just like a lamb,
Then he went to Beaumont, in Toul,
And “Stubby” showed he was no fool.

He always knew when to duck the shells,
And buried his nose at the first gas smells,
But once a small fragment stuck in his breast,
Slightly wounded in action, was “Stubby” blessed.

He went all through Chateau Thierry drive,
And came out of it very much alive,
Then to St. Mihiel “Stubby” came,
And helped those Germans from the plain.

North of Verdun were our hardest battles,
And many men gave death rattles,
But “Stubby” came through hell O.K.,
And is ready to go back to the U.S.A.

He is a fighting bulldog of the old Y.D.,
And is the pride and joy of our company,
When we take him back to the U.S.A.,
“Stubby” will hold the stage night and day.

His owner Bob will take him home,
And nevermore will “Stubby” roam,
He’ll enjoy a much earned rest,
In the place we all love best.
Section 2: War in a Foreign Land

War in a Foreign Land
Approximately 60,000 Connecticut men served overseas with the United States Army and Navy forces. Another 3,000 served with allied forces, such as France, Great Britain, and Italy. Hundreds of Connecticut women served overseas with the Army Nurse Corps, the American Red Cross, and other soldier welfare organizations like the YMCA.

Fighting in France
The majority of Connecticut soldiers served with the 26th “Yankee” Division. The 26th spent more days on the front lines than any other American division except the 1st Division, and it spent the most days in battle (45 total).

Almost all of World War I was fought on land, mostly in France against a German invasion. While the US Navy battled German submarines and transported soldiers across the Atlantic, most servicemen and servicewomen experienced the war in training camps, hospital bases, and the front line trenches in France. The machine gun and powerful explosives caused mass casualties, obliterated the landscape, and forced both sides behind trenches dug deep into the earth. These new technologies, including poison gas, changed the face of war.
Wall quote  “Who can ever forget the impressions of those first days at the front—the shell-torn buildings, fields and factories, the long lines of barbed wire entanglements, the maze of trenches...the boom of the big guns, the whistle of the shells, the patter of falling shrapnel, the burning observation balloon, the falling airplanes, the hum of the bombing planes at night—first and most lasting impressions of modern warfare.”
Reverend Charles E. Hesselgrave, YMCA secretary, from “The 101st Machine Gun Battalion as seen from the YMCA,” 1918-1919

Wall quote  “You should just see the ground alone ground to bits by shells and full of shell holes. For miles around this fort was once a forest and now there are nothing but a few stumps.... We found any number of shoes with the bones of the feet on half the legs in them.”
John Raven, Company A, 315th Ammunition Train, March 22, 1918

Wall quote  “The buildings were simply shattered. What hadn’t fallen in seems as if it would if you breathed too hard while passing it. All life and color had gone. Only the isolated walls and piles of rubbish remained... They gave us a small idea of what we were fighting for."  
Charles Miel, Corporal, Company B, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th “Yankee” Division, February 7, 1918

Wall quote  “The French were quartered in with us and they made the best of companions. The first night they brought us in candles and hot coffee. They would speak very
plainly and slowly and we could usually get their meaning... Most of them had been in the war from the start and through live battles. They all seem hopeful, and were extremely fond of us Americans and our country.”
Charles Miel, Corporal, Company B, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th “Yankee” Division, March 2, 1918

**Wall quote**

“The night of April 19, 1918...the French opened up a barrage. Let me tell you now that a barrage is Hell turned loose and then some, because you have shells of every size and description dropped around you and believe me the shrapnel does fly.” Clayton Squires, Sergeant, Company C, 102nd Infantry, 26th “Yankee” Division, December 17, 1918

**Wall quote**

"It was like an inferno. Bursting shells, shrapnel all around me and the air almost suffocating with gun powder. I had to go through a wood and limbs were crashing trees falling all around. You can’t imagine the wicked sound of flying shrapnel." George W. Cheney, Captain, Company C, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th “Yankee” Division, April 23, 1918

**Wall quote**

Excerpts from the diary of Solomon Wollman, Private 1st Class, Company K, 102nd Infantry, 26th “Yankee” Division, 1918:

March 5: Left dugouts to go to the front line trenches. Hiked over “No Man’s Land” and fell in shell holes. Got all covered with mud from head to foot.

April 22: No sleep for forty-eight hours.
April 23: Two hours sleep today.
April 24: Two hours sleep today.
May 18: Relieved by the Third Battalion at 22
and slept in a dugout that was built for ten men.
We had eighteen in it.

*Story label*  

**Chemical Warfare**
The machine gun forced soldiers to hide behind thousands of miles of trenches. But no one could hide from another new weapon: poison gas. Chlorine and phosgene destroyed lungs. Mustard gas burned lungs and skin. During the 26th “Yankee” Division’s attack at Seicherey, France in April 1918 (the first major engagement by the Americans), the division suffered 214 casualties from gas.

Both sides used gas, dispensing it from pressurized containers. The gas followed the direction of the wind, which could change and send the gas back to one’s own side. Chemical artillery shells soon replaced this method, and could be fired directly at the enemy. At first, soldiers protected themselves with handkerchiefs soaked in water or urine, or made “respirators” out of lint and tape. Military gas masks were soon developed with canisters containing charcoal, soda-lime, and cotton pads. Wearing a mask made it difficult to see, and it did not protect the skin from the burn of mustard gas.

*Wall quote*  

“PRECAUTIONS IN CASE OF CLOUD GAS: Put on mask. Get out of dug out. Warn others.” Excerpt from *Special Trench Orders for Machine Guns*
“The ground and air was just literally soaked with gas, but we have got used to that and keep on going until you have to give in to it.” John Edgar Reynolds, Corporal, Company K, 102nd Infantry, 26th “Yankee” Division, June 28, 1918. Reynolds survived the war and returned to his home in North Haven, but died soon after from the effects of poison gas.

**African American Soldiers in France**

African American soldiers trained in separate military camps and served in segregated units in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Most black soldiers were not sent to combat but served as laborers or stevedores (loading and unloading ship cargo).

However, the First Separate Company of Connecticut (National Guard) faced combat in France as part of the 372nd Regiment of the 93rd Infantry Division. The 93rd was placed under the command of the French Army, whose racial policies were less rigid than those of the United States. The 93rd fought with French arms and equipment, lost 1,500 men in combat, and more than 100 men earned the Croix de Guerre or the Medaile Militaire for acts of heroism.

**Wall quote**

Connecticut Military Questionnaire, 1919
John McLinn Ross (African American) of New Haven 2nd Lieutenant, 351st Field Artillery Reserve, 92nd Division
What were the effects of camp experiences in the United States upon yourself—mental and physical?
“Physical—gained fourteen pounds in the army, and feel that the regularity of meals and work did me a world of good. Mentally—a broadened mind through contact with men.”

What were the effects upon yourself of your overseas experience, either in the army or navy or in camp in France or in England?
“A terrible horror of war, but realizing that it was simply scientific murder. The feeling of love toward the French as a people, and a distrust of England as a nation.”

If you took part in the fighting, what impressions were made upon you by this experience?
“That all men are of the same clay, whether black or white, and that under fire, all color, race and creed is forgotten. That fear for self can be forgotten when others are in danger.”

What has been the effect of all these experiences as contrasted with your state of mind before the war?
“A greater feeling of pride in the achievements of my race, and a hope that this great country of ours will give every man in it a square deal, no matter what his race or color may be.”

*The Connecticut State Council of Defense administered questionnaires to returning servicemen*
and servicewomen (or their families). The documents are archived at the Connecticut State Library and can be accessed through Ancestry.com

**Wall quote**

Connecticut Military Questionnaire, 1919
Rallie Bransford (African American) of New Haven
Corporal, Company I, 367th Infantry, 92nd Division

What has been the effect of all these experiences as contrasted with your state of mind before the war? "Would like to see the colored man share some of the democracy that he fought for so gallantly."

**Individual Highlight**

**William S. Bell**

1886-1980
Hartford, age 32
Corporal, 546th Battalion Engineers, Company A, 1918-1919

When the United States entered the war, William Service Bell was working as a clerk and bookkeeper for a clothing store in Hartford. He was also a respected member of Hartford’s African American community. In the fall of 1917, black and white leaders from Hartford formed the Hartford chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and William S. Bell became its first president. Bell and the NAACP spoke out against Southern lynchings and fought against local discrimination, racism, and inadequate housing.
In August 1918, Bell was drafted into the US Army and sent to Camp Humphrys, VA for training. In his military questionnaire he noted the camp’s “disgusting lack of facilities.” In France, Bell repaired roads, working under shell fire during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the AEF’s largest and bloodiest battle during the war. After the war, Bell moved to New York City. He became a singer and actor, and was president of the Eclectic Club, a literary and artistic society in Harlem.

**Keeping Up Morale:**
The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was the largest non-governmental organization charged with keeping up the US Army’s morale. In the United States and in France, the YMCA constructed Y huts, managed by Y secretaries who organized religious services and other activities such as movies, sports, music, dancing, and singing. Y huts were established in towns (including 16 in Paris), built in camps behind the lines, or cobbled together in trenches on the front. Additional organizations providing for the welfare of soldiers included the Young Women’s Christian Association, the Knights of Columbus, the Salvation Army, and the Jewish Welfare Board.

**The Jewish Welfare Board**
The Jewish Welfare Board provided services to Jewish soldiers at home and overseas, one of seven civilian affiliates of the War Department’s Commission for Training Camp Activities. (The others were the YMCA, YWCA, Knights of Columbus, Salvation
Army, American Library Association, and War Camp Community Service).

This uniform was worn by Rebecca Affachiner. She managed a JWB hut in France at the end of the war, visiting military hospitals and camps, distributing chocolate and stationary, arranging entertainment, and planning a Seder for 350 men. After the war Affachiner served as superintendent of the United Hebrew Charities in Hartford. She later moved to Palestine and became famous when she sewed and displayed the national flag on the day Israel proclaimed statehood, May 14, 1948.

**American helmet**
The US Army modeled its M1917 helmet after the British 1915 Brodie helmet. The US produced 2.7 million helmets during the war. Despite Connecticut’s significant wartime production, it did not make helmets. Steel for the helmets was rolled by the American Sheet & Tin Plate Company and the helmets were stamped into shape by various companies across the country.

**French helmet**
The French Army developed the M15 Adrian helmet in 1915, the first modern steel helmet. It protected soldiers from flying shrapnel from explosive shells. African American soldiers in the 93rd Infantry Division, serving in combat under French command, wore the Adrian helmet and earned the nickname “Blue Helmets.”
“The hut to which I have been assigned....is a long, one story structure, divided part way by a wooden partition, in which is a board window. Through this window most of the 1,500 men thrust their heads and shoulders, once or twice a day, and tell me their wants.” YMCA secretary George B. Thayer, from “Army Influence Over the YMCA in France,” 1919.

“It was the experience of a lifetime to pass in the ration cart safely around that hot corner...and over the bombarded road...and to slip into the wood where our boys lay, ‘digging themselves in,’ and pass along that line such nerve-calmers as cigarettes and chewing-gum, and give a few words of greeting and cheer to our tired men.” Reverend Charles E. Hesselgrave, YMCA secretary, from “The 101st Machine Gun Battalion as seen from the YMCA,” 1918-1919

Reverend Charles E. Hesselgrave  
1868-1927  
Manchester, Age 49  
YMCA Secretary  
Chaplain to the 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 1918-1919

Chaplain officers served in the US Army and Navy during the war, but the need for more chaplains led the AEF to seek help from private organizations such as the Red Cross, the YMCA, the Knights of Columbus, the Salvation Army, and the Jewish
Welfare Board. Charles Hesselgrave, a pastor from Manchester, CT, served as a YMCA secretary in France, selling supplies at a Y hut, visiting field hospitals, and organizing entertainment and religious services.

Hesselgrave also began traveling with the 26th “Yankee” Division’s 101st Machine Gun Battalion, which was mostly comprised of men from the Hartford area, many of whom he already knew. Hesselgrave helped set up Y huts or tents wherever the battalion went, and also served as its unofficial chaplain. In October 1918, Hesselgrave was replaced by an official Army chaplain, and he left the battalion to serve as Divisional Secretary at the Y headquarters in Verdun.

**Individual Highlight**

**George B. Thayer**

1853-1928

West Hartford, Age 65

YMCA Secretary, 1919

George Thayer was a veteran of the Spanish-American War (1898), an attorney, and a long-time YMCA volunteer. After applying eight times to serve with the YMCA in France (denied due to his advanced age), Thayer was finally accepted the day after the Armistice was signed. At his YMCA hut in France, Thayer sold goods (mostly cigarettes) to soldiers on their way to occupied Germany or on their way home. In the town of Beune, he volunteered to work in a Y hut designated for African American
servicemen. YMCA huts and other welfare and military facilities were segregated.

While proud of his service, Thayer criticized the YMCA for mismanaging resources and for compromising its religious principles by allowing the Army to use YMCA facilities to offer treatment for venereal diseases, as well as recruiting young American women “to spend their time and strength almost wholly in dancing with a strange and promiscuous body of idle young men in uniform.”

**Hospitals, Nurses, Red Cross**

More than 22,000 nurses served in the military at home and abroad, recruited by the American Red Cross for the US Army and Navy Nurse Corps. About 10,000 went with the AEF overseas, and 296 died in war services. Nurses were officially recognized by the US War Department as “officers without rank,” but the Red Cross was responsible for providing them with equipment and uniforms.

Nurses, doctors, and other medical personnel treated soldiers at base hospitals, field hospitals, and on the front lines. The leading cause of disability for soldiers was influenza, followed by venereal disease. In addition to battle wounds and injuries, including poison gas, soldiers suffered from diarrhea, typhoid, pneumonia, and other diseases.
Excerpts from the pocket diary of Oscar Sandell, Private 1st Class, Medical Department, Base Hospital 66

July 20: “Worked like the dickens all day, all bed patients. 50 beds. Legs, arms, and other parts of the body shot away.”
July 21: “Worked steady from 6:30am to 8pm. Stood while eating and my feet are as sore as a boil.”
August 13: “Made plaster bandages and about four o’clock we had an operation on a prisoner. Opened right knee. Finished about 6 o’clock.
October 1: “Operating all day. Seven-8 tables going all the time. Did not stop working until 10pm. Had no supper.”
November 6: “Put a big cast on a chap today from his chest to his toes.”
November 24: “Worked like the dickens dressing the wounded and fixing them for evacuation. But the train did not arrive. Expect it tomorrow.”

"You feel as if hell had let loose at times when the boys come through, torn up & gassed & the surgeons & everyone else are working night & day to repair the damage. But they are a lucky lot—even the worst cases & stand the pain with marvelous fortitude—It must be the conviction that they have done their bit that helps them through. Those who are slightly wounded make light of it & even refuse to be helped along—though a machine gun bullet through the leg or the arm can't be comfortable." Reverend Ernest DeFremery Miel, Red Cross worker, October 3, 1918
“It was just like something that must have happened centuries and centuries ago—the streets of piled up stones, the broken roofs, the deserted parks, the cathedral in piled up desolation—somehow I could not make myself realize the tragedy of it. It seemed as if I had always walked along streets of destruction, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to see the ruins all about.”

Hilda M. Keller, Stenographer, American Red Cross, June 9, 1919

**Hilda M. Keller**

1888-1978
Hartford, Age 30
Stenographer, American Red Cross and Army Nurse Corps, 1918-1919

A few months before the war ended, Hilda Keller was granted a year’s leave from her secretary job at the Hartford Theological Seminary to serve with the American Red Cross. While on board the ship to Europe, Keller and dozens of other Red Cross women took crash courses in bandaging, French, and other skills they might need during their service.

After arriving in France, Keller was transferred to the Army Nurse Corps, serving as a stenographer to Julia Stimson, the Chief Nurse of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) and its 10,000+ nurses. Keller contracted the flu in November 1918, but she recovered and resumed her work until relieved from
duty in June 1919. After the war, Keller worked as a secretary for the Institute of Living in Hartford and for the Motor Vehicle Department, and stayed involved with the Red Cross for the rest of her life.

**Ruth C. Williams**

1890-1953  
Glastonbury, Age 28  
Nurse, Army Nurse Corps, 1918-1919

Ruth Williams attended the Presbyterian Hospital School for Nursing in New York City and became a registered nurse in 1917. She was called into active service with the Army Nurse Corps on April 8, 1918. After training with the Dental Corps at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. and at St. Mary’s Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota, Williams departed for France on July 4, 1918. Williams served at several military hospitals in France during the war and for eight months after the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. She was hospitalized for eight days with influenza in Nice, France.

Immediately after the war, Williams served as a medical missionary in China for ten years before returning to Connecticut. A scrapbook of her time in France (now in the CHS collection) contains photographs of nurses, soldiers, and the cities she visited, and many letters from soldiers thanking her for her care and service.
Charles F. Coughlin
1891-1918
Hartford, Age 27
Sergeant, Company F, 102nd Infantry, 26th "Yankee" Division, 1917-1918
Died in France, October 27, 1918

Charles Coughlin worked as a clerk for the Aetna Life Insurance Company in Hartford when he enlisted in the Connecticut National Guard on July 27, 1917. Around the country, National Guard units were combined into larger divisions under US Army control, and Coughlin's outfit became part of the 102nd Infantry in the 26th "Yankee" Division, which contained men from all six New England states.

Coughlin's brother, Matthew Coughlin, who was fifteen years older, served with the YMCA. In letters home, Coughlin mentioned seeing his brother during the war. Coughlin was wounded on October 23, 1918. He died on October 27 at a hospital in Souilly, near Verdun, France. Less than three weeks later, the Armistice with Germany was signed.

"Had a surprise visit from Matt about a week ago. He came upon our company accidentally while snooping around up near where we were... Well as he probably told you I'm well and only hope I can stay well for one month more and then I guess I'll be safe & sure of getting back. It looks like the beginning of the end now all right and the end can't come any too quick to
suit me.” Charles Coughlin, in a letter to his mother, October 12, 1918, two weeks before he was killed.

Wall quote

“We are learning what war is. This noon we had bread for the first time in three days. We have been living on hard tack, corned beef, and cheese.” Charles F. Coughlin, Company F, 102nd Infantry, 26th “Yankee” Division, November 16, 1917

Signage for flipbook

A Son’s Death

These letters help document (in a small part) the experience of Edward and Sarah Coughlin, of Hartford, as they sought information from state and federal authorities about their son’s death.

Included with these letters is Edward Coughlin’s application for a victory medal for his son. In 1919 the victory medal was awarded to all who served in the war.
Section 3: War Ends, Life Goes On

War Ends, Life Goes On
The United States fought in Europe for less than 18 months, helping bring an end to World War I. Men and women returned home to face many of the same concerns they had when they left. Struggles against racism and sexism continued. Women wanted the vote, laborers wanted protections at work, and immigrants wanted to be welcomed into their new home. Veterans sought employment and recovery from physical and mental trauma.

Welcome Home
After the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, an American army of occupation remained in Europe, but many servicemen and servicewomen began their return trip to America. Between May and June 1919, about 300,000 troops returned, and by August the last of the US combat troops had left France. Celebrations, parades, ceremonies, and medals greeted soldiers as they disembarked at US ports and eventually made their way home. The WWI victory medal was sent to every soldier in 1919. A few were awarded the Medal of Honor (the only medal prior to the war), the Distinguished Service Cross, or the Distinguished Service Medal (both created in 1918).
Clayton Squires
1899-1971
North Haven, Age 19
Sergeant, Company C, 102nd Infantry, 26th “Yankee” Division, 1917-1920
Wounded in action on April 30 and October 25, 1918

On July 24, 1918, the US War Department listed Clayton Squires as “missing in action.” However, his parents received a letter from Squires dated the same day, and another letter soon after, in which Squires wrote that he was in a hospital recovering from a gas attack. Having relieved his parents, Squires rejoined the front lines, but was wounded on October 25 when an artillery shell killed the soldier next to him, knocking Squires unconscious and severely wounding his leg.

Squires returned to the US in February 1919, and was recognized by the War Department as 20% disabled. Squires later worked as a deputy and as a consultant for the Connecticut State Welfare Department.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Many returning soldiers required medical care for physical wounds, for the long-term effects of poison gas, and for what are recognized today as traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder. The term “shell shock” was coined soon after the war began. It was first thought to be a physical wound to the brain caused by the power of exploding shells. But soldiers who had not been near an explosion suffered
similar symptoms: shaking, stammering, problems with speech, depression, insomnia, headaches, nervousness, and loss of memory.

During the war, electric shock therapy was one of many treatments at first, but as doctors studied more cases, they began recommending rest, peace and quiet, and psychotherapy sessions. Of course, women also suffered psychological trauma during the war from their work as nurses or ambulance drivers. Few women were diagnosed or treated. They were simply sent home if they were unable to continue their work.

Caring for Veterans
This collection of letters reveals the work of Red Cross worker Edith Corttis as she monitored and sought treatment for veterans in Thompson, CT. Corttis was head of the Home Service committee in her town’s branch of the American Red Cross. Red Cross Home Services helped provide aid to sick or disabled veterans and their families.

Wall quote
Connecticut State Military Questionnaire, 1919
Corporal Charles Miel of Hartford, Corporal, Company B, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th “Yankee” Division

What were the effects of camp experiences in the United States upon yourself—mental and physical?
“My physical condition was improved by the training here. Mentally the training developed inertia.”
What were the effects upon yourself of your overseas experience, either in the army or navy or in camp in France or in England? “Physically the strain from over exertion and strain in battle weakened my nerves and physic.”

If you took part in the fighting, what impressions were made upon you by this experience? “The supremacy of spirit over organized force. The unnecessary hardships and loss of life due to our military system.”

What has been the effect of all these experiences as contrasted with your state of mind before the war? “My mind is much more inactive, but I feel as if I see things in a better light.”

The Connecticut State Council of Defense administered questionnaires to returning servicemen and servicewomen (or their families). The documents are archived at the Connecticut State Library and can be accessed through Ancestry.com

Wall quote "I am very sure that ever since my service overseas there has been a higher state of tension and that my nervous system was somewhat over strained, although I was not conscious of it at the time." Ruth C. Williams, Army Nurse Corps, Connecticut State Military Questionnaire, 1919
The American Legion
In March 1919, as thousands of soldiers began returning home, officers and soldiers in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) gathered in Paris to form a new servicemen’s organization to benefit veterans of the war. The American Legion was officially chartered by Congress on September 16, 1919.

Local American Legion posts were often named after a town’s fallen soldier. The Corporal Frank Coyle Post No. 1 of Waterbury was Connecticut’s first post, formed in June 1919. Today the American Legion has expanded to include veterans and active soldiers of wars from WWI to the present, with over 200 posts in Connecticut and more than 14,900 across the country.

Rights for Workers
As factory production boomed during the war, many workers joined unions and fought for better wages and working conditions. Nationally, over 4 million workers went on strike between 1915 and 1918. When the war ended, factories laid off thousands of workers, but labor activity continued. Over 4 million workers went on strike in 1919 alone.

In Connecticut, political groups like the Hartford chapter of the Labor Party of the United States (founded in 1919) advocated for a 40-hour work week, representation by workers and women on city boards, police protection for strikers, and a minimum wage.
**Women Fight for Equal Rights**

During the war, women served overseas in noncombatant roles in the US Navy, the Marines, the Army Nurse Corps, the Red Cross, and many volunteer organizations. At home they volunteered in many ways to support the war effort, and filled jobs left vacant by men fighting in Europe.

At the same time, many women fought another battle for equal rights at home. This was a long-fought movement that began long before World War I, but it intensified during and after the war as women demonstrated across the country, faced harassment and imprisonment, and finally achieved voting rights in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment.

**Wall quote**

“The workers by hand and by brain constitute more than nine-tenths of the people. But the other one-tenth control the wealth of the country and are therefore in a position to dominate government so long as you lie down on the job and let them.” Labor Party flyer, 1919. CHS collection.

**The Red Scare**

During the war, foreign-born workers were already under suspicion. Union leaders and socialists who criticized capitalism could be accused of disloyalty and prosecuted under the Espionage Act of 1917. The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to a nationwide fear of secret communist plots throughout the United States.
After the war, the US Department of Justice investigated, arrested, and deported immigrants suspected of anarchism, communism, and radicalism. Led by US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, between 1919 and 1920 the “Palmer Raids” resulted in the arrest of thousands. In Connecticut, over a thousand people were arrested, many of them Russians, some of whom were eventually deported.

**Area label**  
Immigration  
Leading up to World War I, the US experienced mass immigration, mostly from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. Immigration slowed but continued during and after the war, as people came seeking jobs and freedom from political or religious persecution. Connecticut’s foreign-born population faced suspicion, particularly if they came from a country fighting against the allies. Yet they filled war-time factory jobs, and many rushed to achieve citizenship or enlist in the military. As the war ended, a familiar tension existed between foreign-born and native-born Americans. While immigrants found economic opportunities in Connecticut, they also faced discrimination and even the rise of extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

**Wall quote**  
Connecticut State Military Questionnaire, 1919  
Private Samuel George of Danbury (immigrant from Syria), Company B, 315th Infantry, 79th Division
What was your attitude toward military service in general and toward your call in particular? "Every able body had to go to the Army and I was willing to be called to defend America, knowing and hoping that America will defend me in time of need."

What were the effects upon yourself of your overseas experience, either in the army or navy in camp in France or in England? "The effect is that I am nervous for the rest of my life and never expect to enjoy the health before I went across."

If you took part in the fighting, what impressions were made upon you by this experience? "I cannot describe it, all I can call it is a man slaughter by wholesale."

If a change of occupation was occasioned by reason of disability acquired in the service, describe the process of re-education and readjustment: "On account of being gassed I am nervous and could not handle a machine in the factory I used to work in before I went in the Army, so I have a little fruit stand, from which I think to earn my living, but I hardly can earn the most necessary things."

*The Connecticut State Council of Defense administered questionnaires to returning servicemen and servicewomen (or their families). The documents*
are archived at the Connecticut State Library and can be accessed through Ancestry.com

"On November 1, 1923, just a month before I was fifteen, I came to the United States as an immigrant from Poland. It is a date which will ever be in my memory. As yet, it is the greatest event in my life. Having lived through the World War and the worse conditions after it, I know in some measure what suffering is and can appreciate the security, freedom, and opportunities of the United States." Jacob Gordon of Weaver High School, Hartford, CT, from a school essay, 1929

**Giuseppe Mazzafera**
1891-1963
Mormanno, Italy, Age 27
40th Infantry Regiment, Italian Army, 1915-1919
Prisoner of war in Austria, 1915-1919

Giuseppe Mazzafera was born and raised in Mormanno, Province of Cosenza, Calabria, Italy. He worked in a lumber mill before enlisting in the Italian Army on May 24, 1915. The day before, Italy had declared war on Austria-Hungary, joining the allied forces of Great Britain, France, and Russia. Mazzafera was captured in October 1915 and spent three and a half years in a war prison in Austria, returning to Italy after the war ended.

In 1920 Mazzafera immigrated to the United States and settled in Hartford, CT, where he eventually
became a US citizen. He worked in a restaurant, as a truck driver, and later became a machinist. He and his wife (also from Mormanno, Italy) had seven children and became deeply involved in local Italian-American clubs and the Catholic community. Giuseppe Mazzafera died at the Rocky Hill Veterans Hospital in Rocky Hill, CT at the age of 71.

**Post-war Relief Efforts**
Worldwide, approximately 13 million civilians died as a result of the war, whether from military action, starvation, exposure, disease, or massacres. (In addition, 8.5 million soldiers were killed.) Survivors lost family members, homes, and belongings. Many fled war zones or stayed to see their neighborhoods destroyed.

Many American immigrants had family members back in Europe, and they sent money, food, and other goods to their homelands. The US government used war relief as a propaganda theme to encourage patriotic and monetary support for the war, and provided more than $250 million in loans to Europe for relief and reconstruction. Private organizations also coordinated fundraising and relief efforts.
Helen Lyman
1888-1976
Hartford, Age 30
War relief worker in France, 1918-1922

Helen Lyman traveled to France at least three times between 1918-1922, the first time with the US Department of Civilian Relief through the American Red Cross. She also likely volunteered with the American Committee for Devastated France. Founded in 1917 by Anne Morgan (daughter of the famous Connecticut financier J.P. Morgan) the committee recruited women who could finance their own travel, speak French, and who held a driver’s license. In France, these volunteers directed reconstruction and agricultural production and established libraries, social centers, and kindergartens. The committee employed construction workers, doctors, librarians, and sports directors.

In Hartford, Lyman served as chairman of the Connecticut Branch of “La Renaissance des Cités.” This organization was founded in France in 1916 with a mission to rebuild villages while preserving historic charm. Lyman delivered clothing and processed applications for sewing machines for French villagers. She described seemingly empty villages where the inhabitants lived in cellars, the
only structures that had survived the devastation of war.

Wall quote

“And wherever you go you see people fixing things up. Sometimes in the very ruins of what you can hardly believe ever was a house you see the wash hanging out to dry. And the children are running about in lots of parts of the town quite as if nothing had happened. But some of the streets are unbelievable. It is as if you were in a stone quarry where they had forgotten to carry off the stones. Absolutely not a thing is left to suggest that these heaps of rubbish ever had the form of a house where people lived. Other parts of the town are comparatively untouched, but in some ways they seem more pathetic. When you see a part of a bedroom hanging in the air, with a chair and a bed still belonging to it, it seems so personal, so human, that it strikes you far more than where there is nothing left at all.” Hilda Keller, Stenographer, American Red Cross, June 9, 1919

Area label

World War I Memorials

After the war, Connecticut towns, companies, and organizations erected honor rolls (lists of residents who served) and installed memorial plaques, statues, and landscape projects. Today, drivers along Bristol’s Memorial Boulevard (completed in 1921) pass the city’s WWI monument and 50 oak trees accompanied by memorial plaques. The largest WWI monument in Connecticut is in Walnut Hill Park in New Britain.
There is no WWI monument on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Perhaps too many wars have commanded the country’s attention since. The second World War followed just 21 years later. During the 50th anniversary of World War I, American soldiers were dying in Vietnam.

**Wall quote**

“No man’s land also was very difficult to realize as being desolate... My emotions seem to have been worn out, and I could only see it as a great, messy field, with holes all over it, flowers growing everywhere, lots of poppies, and yellow flowers, and blue cornflowers, tangles of barbed wire, here and there piles of old ammunition... all the trees dead, as if there had been a forest fire, and here and there crumbling piles where there had formerly been a village.

And yet I did not realize what it was at all. There I was in an auto-truck full of happy, khaki-clad boys, and it seemed too impossible to think of boys just like them fighting and dying all over that field. But the little crosses in all sorts of unexpected places made you know what had really happened.” Hilda Keller, Stenographer, American Red Cross, June 9, 1919